

SCHECHTER ALUMNI *Spotlights*



BRYAN VILLANO (SSDS '96)

“Schechter prepares students to be well-rounded adults with pride in their Jewish identities and a love for education and community.”

Alum **Bryan Villano (SSDS '96)** has never been one to shy away from a challenge. Now living in Encinitas, CA, Bryan has fostered a passion for ski mountaineering—not in spite of, but driven by his personal battle with Multiple sclerosis (MS). **“I think physical activity is key to mental health and well-being. My MS diagnosis fueled my desire to strengthen my body and mind, and preparing for a climb gets me in the best shape of my entire life so I can fight whatever battles I need to prepare for in the future.”**



Bryan spent months planning an ambitious November 2023 climb—taking on three mountains between 17-20k ft in the South American Andes. When war broke out in Israel, he transformed his personal challenge into a meaningful philanthropic opportunity. Making fundraising for Magen David Adom his main climb objective, Bryan successfully completed his expedition, which included summiting Huayna Potosi (19,974 ft) in Bolivia. Throughout the trek that he describes as **“more about getting uncomfortable than it was about reaching the top,”** he ultimately surpassed their fundraising goal.

“**Together we raised \$5,534! In times when the whole world seems to have forgotten why the war is happening, Israel needs the friendship and support of its community.**”

This mountaineering fundraiser is far from Bryan's first foray into grassroots fundraising. He participates in an annual triathlon for the Challenged Athletes Foundation that raises money to fit disabled athletes with prosthetics, and he has recently created a 501(c)(3) organization alongside three fellow Schechter alumni (Ben L, Alon S, and Brian L): Friends of Shmulik. [Click here](#) to learn more about how Bryan and his partners are purchasing essential military gear for their friends' IDF reservist unit.

Bryan's commitment to helping others was a value nurtured during his years as a Schechter student. He notes, **“the concept of Tikkun Olam impacted me greatly.”** He also believes Schechter provided him with a strong foundation that served him well in higher education, sharing **“I was well-prepared. The bilingual aspect of Schechter was challenging for me, so when I got to high school and college, I knew what it was like to face difficult academic challenges and how to push through to succeed.”**

Bryan went on to graduate from Deerfield High School and earn a degree in marketing and international studies from the University of Denver, where he served as a Student Senator and was active in Hillel. He also earned an MBA from University of California San Diego.

Bryan co-founded ContractPower, a company using AI to summarize contracts and regulatory documents based on his 10 years of experience in renewable energy. **“As a co-founder, I handle sales, marketing, and organizational strategy/product design,”** he says. **“It's a lot of fun, but it was also an exciting challenge starting an organization from scratch!”**

He lives in California with his wife, Dr. Janna Hoffman, an ER physician, and their two children—six- and eight-year-old boys—who attend San Diego Jewish Academy. Janna's sister, Elana Hoffman Goldsmith, is a Schechter graduate (SSDS '99).



Bryan has two siblings: **Elizabeth (SSDS '08)** lives in Denver and works in communications for the National Park Service, and **Jeffrey (SSDS '99)** is a software engineer living in Tel Aviv with his wife and three daughters—he is currently serving in the IDF.